

## ZOOLOGY

## Protection Extended Nearly Extinct Teddy-Bears

See Front Cover

**K**OALAS, known colloquially in Australia as "native bears," real live teddy-bears in soft plush-like fur, have lately become the objects of special solicitude, both official and private, in the far island-continent that is their home. For several generations nobody paid any more attention to them than Americans pay to squirrels, for they were so numerous that it never occurred to Australians that they could ever become scarce. But a highly fatal epidemic got started among them some years ago, killing them by the thousands. Hunters also shot great numbers for their fur. So before it was fairly realized, Australia's live teddy-bears were dangerously close to the extinction line.

Official action, though dangerously delayed, has been vigorous, and may avail to save the survivors. Shooting koalas is now forbidden; though as with most such sweeping prohibitions there are not sufficient means for securing really complete enforcement.

Even more promising is the setting aside of well-supervised sanctuary areas, where not only these attractive marsupials but also other interesting but threatened native animals and plants can have a chance for their lives. One such area is Koala Park, near Sydney. This is managed by Noel Burnet, who supplied the appealing koala portrait that appears on the front cover of this issue of the SCIENCE NEWS LETTER.

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## PHYSIOLOGY

## Stimulating Climate Hard On Machinery of Body

**A** NEW understanding of the important effects which climate has on the health and bodily machinery of human beings was described by Dr. Clarence A. Mills of the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine at the meeting at New Orleans of the American Society of Tropical Medicine.

Although the stimulating climate of the northern and northwestern parts of the United States is popularly considered more healthful than the sluggish, semi-tropical climate of the South, Dr. Mills found that in some regions the climate appears to have too stimulating an effect on certain bodily processes.

Where the climate is most stimulating, Dr. Mills found that the death-rates from certain diseases, such as diabetes, exophthalmic goiter and Addison's disease, were highest. His theory is that in such regions the drive of the stimulating climate is forcing an increasing number of people to live at such a fast pace that their body machinery breaks down.

Suicides, the effect of mental breakdown, he also found to be most frequent where the climate is too stimulating.

In the stimulating areas of the North and Northwest humanity pays the price for its rapid industrial development in increasing breakdown of the bodily machinery as seen in the increasing deaths from diseases like diabetes, he said.

He advised that cases of mental or bodily breakdown should be sent south for treatment when possible, so that they might have the benefit of the lessened vigor of the climatic drive.

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## FORESTRY

## Would Send Unemployed To Clean up Forests

**I**F PUBLIC funds are made available for the relief of unemployed by taking care of hitherto neglected large-scale jobs this winter, there is plenty of work for several divisions of the army of the unemployed in the forests of America, cleaning them up to promote better growth of the valuable trees and reduce fire hazard. The use of relief-job funds in this way is advocated editorially in the current issue of the *Journal of Forestry*.

The writer of the article does not support the idea of using relief-job men for reforestation on a large scale, as has been suggested. He points out that too elaborate and time-consuming preparations would have to be made: gathering and planting seed, laying out nurseries, etc.; and that by the time all this work could be done the depression would very probably be over, and the whole program would perish, with great waste of money and work, for lack of further appropriations. On the other hand, it is pointed out, laborers can go into the woods for a clean-up program with almost no loss of time; they need not have as much skill as is required for a planting program; and a useful by-product in many places would be cheap cordwood for the use of the needy.

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# IN SCIENCE

## ARCHAEOLOGY

## Stone Age Industry Was Highly Specialized

**S**TANDARDIZATION in industry—finding the best sizes and shapes for pickle bottles, for example, and then making all pickle bottles by that satisfactory pattern—is nothing new in the world's economic history. Back in the Old Stone Age, when the leading industry was turning out flint axes and knives, the stone tool and weapon business was standardized over wide territories.

This is the conclusion reported by Reid Moir, British archaeologist who has specialized in study of the stone implements left by Old Stone Age men.

Mr. Moir is now strongly inclined to the view that, at certain periods of the past, stone implements were being made on the same specialized plan over enormous areas of the earth's surface, having started from a common center.

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## MEDICINE

## Seeks Effects of Tropics On Rheumatic Fever

**W**OULD the tropics make a favorable place of residence for persons suffering from heart disease in a somewhat acute stage as a result of an attack of rheumatic fever? The answer to this question was sought from members of the American Society of Tropical Medicine living in the tropics by Dr. Louis F. Bishop and Dr. Louis F. Bishop, Jr., of New York City.

In a paper presented before the society these physicians pointed out the part played in the world's history by climate relations of disease. Vast areas of the world's surface cannot be utilized at the present time because the life of the inhabitants has always been threatened by prevailing disease.

The people of the tropics are said to be immune to inflammatory rheumatism. This prompted the inquiry of the New York physicians into the medical and economic advantage of removing to the tropics persons who had suffered from this disease.

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# E FIELDS

## ETHNOLOGY

## Scientists Watch Changes In Living Maya Civilization

**B**Y STUDYING living Mayas in the peninsula of Yucatan, science is beginning to catch glimpses of how civilization comes to groups of human beings. What has been learned so far, from observations in a Mayan Indian village, was reported by Dr. Robert Redfield, anthropologist of the University of Chicago, in a lecture at the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Yucatan offers a laboratory where civilization can be observed in the making, Dr. Redfield explained. Not only do the Mayan inhabitants represent the entire range of social development from primitive tribe to modern city, but these groups in so many different stages of advancement are all being influenced by civilizing factors today, and it is possible to note how changes come.

The first village which has been studied is Chan Kom, near the ruins of the ancient Mayan city of Chichen Itza. The 250 people of Chan Kom are all Mayan Indians, representing a middle stage of progress. Chan Kom mixes old and new, often incongruously.

Native medicine men tell the people that sickness is brought by evil spirits or by angry gods, and the people have enough confidence in these explanations to consult the medicine man. But a sick person may also send to the town drug store for medicine.

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## ETHNOLOGY

## Indians Had War Gas, French Scientists Finds

**P**OISON GAS warfare, regarded today as one of the developments of civilized, scientific fighting, was used by Indians of Canada back in the sixteenth century; and was regarded by the French explorers as something so barbarous that they tried to dissuade the redskins from such savage tactics.

As proof of the Indians' skill in handling this fighting technique, Prof. de La Ronciere, of the French Marine Academy, cites a description of Indian

fighting written by Jacques Cartier, in 1536.

The Indians gathered quantities of faggots and cedar boughs, and heaped them up and saturated them with fat of the sea wolf and other fish and with some poisonous substance. Then, when the enemy attacked, the trick was to force them into a position where they would get full benefit of the wind-borne fumes. That maneuver completed, a torch was touched to the faggot heap from which rose the fumes, thick, black, and dangerous.

The fumes were not death-dealing, but did blind and suffocate the victims. Then the poison gas brigade, keeping safely out of the drift of the fumes, bore down on the enemy and took what toll they pleased.

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## ARCHAEOLOGY

## Scientist Takes Census of City Centuries Dead

**T**AKING A CENSUS of an American city that flourished 2,000 years ago is one of the newest feats of archaeological research, reported by Oliver G. Ricketson, Jr., of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, in a recent lecture at the Institution. Mr. Ricketson announced results of the latest explorations at the ruins of Uaxatun, in Guatemala, the oldest Mayan site so far discovered.

The census of Uaxactun was taken, not by counting heads in the usual manner of census taking, but by counting houses, Mr. Ricketson explained. The site of Uaxactun has at the center a plaza and pyramid-shaped monuments where Mayan priests and astronomers conducted religious ceremonies and watched the skies. Out from this civic and religious center radiated the residential section, so to speak, consisting of thatched huts surrounded by little farms. Even after so many centuries, the house mounds, or low platforms on which the huts were built, may still be seen and counted; and Mr. Ricketson said that a cross-section of the area has been examined by counting house mounds in different directions as far as ten miles out from the civic center.

There were 78 houses per square mile of habitable land, it has been determined. And, considering that ten miles is about as far as an Indian would walk to "go to town," Mr. Ricketson set that as the probable outside boundary. On this basis, Uaxactun had a population of about 48,000 Indians in its prime.

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## PHYSIOLOGY

## Smoking Found to Dull Man's Sense of Taste

**I**F YOU are a smoker, your breakfast orange does not have the sour tang that it would have for you if you were to forego the use of tobacco. Likewise pickles are not so sour. And the acid taste of souring milk is not so readily detected.

This effect of tobacco on the individual's threshold of taste, interesting to both physiologist and psychologist, was discovered at the psychological laboratories of the Catholic University of America, Washington, by Rev. Robert A. Boelcke who performed his experiments under the direction of Dr. J. Edward Rauth.

The acids used were: acetic, the familiar acid of vinegar, citric found in oranges and other citrus fruits, lactic acid found in milk, and hydrochloric, nitric, and sulphuric acids. Solutions of all these were prepared so that there would be a wide range in intensity.

Smoking dulls the taste for all these acids, the only exception being sulphuric acid. Sulphuric acid has a puckering effect on the mouth, and the investigators believe it may have been detected because of this astringent quality before it was actually tasted.

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## PSYCHOLOGY

## Mental Tests Used to Scale Man's Life Span

**P**SYCHOLOGISTS have now traced the changes in mental ability of man throughout the whole range of life from the time he is first old enough to take a mental test. The investigation has been conducted at Stanford University by Dr. Walter R. Miles.

More than eight hundred persons have been tested in this program, and the age range was from 6 to 95 years.

One of the tests given measured the ability to respond to an outside auditory signal with a certain movement of hand or foot. This is required every day of practically everyone, but is especially important to the motorist or, for that matter, the pedestrian.

In this ability and in most of those studied there is a fairly rapid increase through the years of childhood and early youth, a fairly long peak or crest representative of maturity, and then a slow, regular decline.

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